

Social Work Profession: A Methodological Overview

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Abstract:

Social work is an enabling profession that assists people with problems of living and human relationships and with the dysfunctional complexities of various social institutions. Today, this profession is utilized in a variety of settings and agencies. Some of the significant ones are psychiatric, medical, marriage and family counseling, school, corrections, rehabilitation, public welfare, drug abuse, women and child welfare, and social policies. Social work profession ensures that social workers develop scientific knowledge and professional skills to tackle human problems, understand their needs and access available resources to provide solutions at the individuals, groups and communities levels. There are six methods of social work profession that come under two broad methods named primary method and secondary method. In primary method, the first three methods are: (i) Social Case Work, (ii) Social Group Work, and (iii)

Social Work with Community Organization; while in secondary method, the next three methods are: (i) Social Action, (ii) Social Welfare Administration, and (iii) Social Work Research . Thus, in the discourse of social work profession, this paper attempts to provide a linear understanding about the methodological overview of professional social work practice. The paper is divided into seven parts. The first part deals with the introduction. The second part discusses about the social work profession. The third part describes the characteristics of social work profession. The fourth part focuses upon the purpose of social work profession. The fifth part presents the methods of social work profession. The sixth part deals with the principles of social work profession. Finally, the last part presents the code of ethics in social work profession along with conclusion.

Key Words: Social Work Profession, Methods, Purpose, Principles, and Code of Ethics.

Introduction:

Though professional social work practice is far reaching in its scope, a changing world is continue to present new challenges, opportunities and avenues to make a difference. Health care, educational and community based services are becoming prevalent and require the special skills for social workers. Poverty, alcohol and drug abuse, and the generational transmission of domestic violence are issues faced by nearly all practitioners. Today, technology is advancing several methods of service delivery and allowing for the extension of new approaches to the traditional notions of existing relationships. The professional social work practice is distinctive from other helping professional services in its approach of assisting people to function optimally within their environments.

Today's social workers have access to a far wider range of information and knowledge related to values and ethics than did earlier generations of practitioners. Times have changed dramatically in this respect, and the profession's literature must keep pace. Contemporary social workers must be acquainted with advancing knowledge related to the profession's values and the kind of ethical issues and the

challenges that practitioners encounter (Reamer, 2013). Urban and rural communities facing poverty, high unemployment, lack of infrastructure, environmental problems, and disinvestment often seem beyond help. Traditional welfare state policies provide assistance to impoverished and troubled families, but do little to help families and communities develop (Sherraden & Ninacs, 2009). Practice in social work and the human services involve assisting a wide variety of people who require help in dealing with problems in their lives or providing social services to people so that they can live their lives more effectively. Children and their families, young people, people with physical or intellectual disabilities, with mental health, needs, and problems associated with old age, and issues faced by communities are all part the broad focus of these services under social work practice (Hugman, 2013).

Social Work Profession:

When a question is posed 'what is social work profession?' we expose ourselves to multiple interpretations and associated queries. Does the question imply that there is a single, particular entity, job or profession that we call by the name of social work? And, if so, is social work a global

phenomenon or does it relate solely to particular nations at specific periods in their development? When we come to analyze the questions of definition still further we see that the practices of social work vary and differ not only across the countries of the world, something that may well be expected and given the local circumstances in which social workers operate, but also within the UK itself. Within the four administrations in the UK (England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales), the regulation of social work by professional bodies differs, and legislation underpinning social work practice varies specially between England and Wales, and Scotland. If what we do as social workers portrays what we are in the eyes of the public, and if what we do is shaped by legislation that is singular to a country or region, then we have a range of social work type. So, it is a fact that social work profession is not a homogenous entity. The complexities of social work practice and the diverse meanings associated with it across the world, and even in individual nations, are acknowledged in the literature. The acceptance of the broad and somewhat problematic definition of International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), 2000, is however indicative of similarities and

standards in social work globally. The commonalities are seen within shared approaches to aspects of social work curricula, methods, practices, and legislation and administration: “The social work profession facilitates social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are centre of social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance well-being” (Parker & Doel, 2013). In modern times, social work profession can be defined in the words of Water A. Friedlander, “Social work assist in realizing democratic principles and human rights, seeking to secure for all citizens a decent standard of living, social security and the fulfillment of the universal human need for love, acceptance, recognition and status” (Bhattacharya, 2012).

Characteristics of Social Work Profession:

Social work may be defined as an art, a science, a profession that helps people to solve personal, group, and community

problems and to attain personal, group, and community relationships through social work practice, including casework, group work, community organization, social welfare administration, social action and social work research. The major focus is on reducing problems in human relationships and on enriching living through improved human interaction. The characteristics of social work profession are discussed below as:

- In social work practice, focus is on the wholeness and totality of the person, encompassing the person, environmental factors, and behavior.
- Emphasis is also given on the significance of the family in molding and influencing behavior.
- Social workers have a comprehensive knowledge regarding community resources and are able to tap them to meet the needs of their clients.
- Traditional social work practice emphasizes three basic processes: casework, group work, and community organization. Casework involves a close, face-to-face relationship, mainly on an individual-to-individual basis, in

working with people and their problems. Group work utilizes the group as the tool to bring about desired changes in social functioning with troubled persons. Community organization is the inter-group approach toward facing and solving social pathologies. Social workers often play an advocate role to strengthen and improve community resources and bring desired social changes.

- The *relationship* is the key in the social work process. Everything that is a part of the interview is vital, but to the social worker, the feeling tones between the worker and client are particularly significant. The social worker attempts to make it possible for the client to face and solve his/her problems by sharing knowledge and assisting with understanding and acceptance in an emotionally supportive relationship.
- The *social* in social work profession emphasizes stress on social interaction and resultant social functioning and malfunctioning. Important principles from sociology and social psychology, as well as

from group dynamics, are woven into the artful fabric of social work, and are utilized to understand relationships of people and in helping them to resolve their conflicts.

- A social worker is significantly effective in developing and employing the team approach and in bringing about coordination of services and activities. Professional social worker is regarded as the catalyst, coordinator and integrator who possess the ability and responsibility to help the professional team work together and function in optimal fashion (Skidmore et. al., 1991)

Purpose of Social Work Profession:

Ultimately, social work profession is concerned with the interactions between people and their social environment which affect the ability of people to accomplish their life tasks, alleviate distress, and realize their aspirations and values. The purpose of social work therefore is:

- Enhancing the problem solving and coping capacities of people,

- Linking people with the systems that provide them with resources, services, and opportunities,
- Promoting the effective and humane operation of these systems, and
- Contributing to the development and improvement of social policy (Higham, 2006).

Methods of Social Work Profession:

The practice of social work profession is categorized into (I) Primary Methods, and (II) Secondary Methods. In primary methods, three methods are proceeded to intervene the problems of people and provide solutions: (i) Social Case Work, (ii) Social Group Work, and (iii) Social Work with Community Organization. While in secondary methods, three methods are taken up for practice: (i) Social Action, (ii) Social Welfare Administration, and (iii) Social Work Research.

- (i) **Social Case Work:** Social case work refers to social treatment of a maladjusted individual involving an attempt to understand his/her personality, behavior, social relationships, and to assist him/her in working out a better social and personal adjustment.

(ii) Social Group Work: It is a method through which individuals in groups in social agency settings are assisted by a worker who guides their interaction in programme activities so that they may relate themselves to others and experience growth opportunities in accordance with their needs and capacities to the end of individual, group, and community development.

(iii) Social Work with Community Organization: It is a process by which a social worker utilizes his/her insight and skills to assist communities towards a solution of their problems.

(iv) Social Action: It may be described as group effort to solve mass social problem or to further socially desirable objectives by attempting to influence basic social and economic condition or practices.

(v) Social Welfare Administration: It is the process of transforming social policy into social services and the use of experience in evaluating and modifying policy.

(vi) Social Work Research: It is concerned with the functions of

identification and evaluation of social problems and needs, the development and evaluation of service delivery systems and client treatment programmes.

While practicing given above methods of professional social work, social worker plays several key roles in serving clients. As a care giver, he/she counsel and supports people with problems in a therapeutic way to promote change. As a consultant, he/she works with individuals and groups to help in their problems and programmes. As a broker, he/she helps people to reach the services they need and makes the system more useful. As a mobilizer, he/she tries to bring new resources to individuals and groups. As an advocate, he/she works for the improvement of policies and laws in order to make system more effective. As a referral agent, he/she refers the individuals and groups to avail the services accessible in other agencies (Misra, 1994)

Principles of Social Work Profession:

The profession of social work also provides certain principles that are to be followed by social worker while intervening problems of people and assisting them to find solutions. Those principles are:

- **Principle of Individualization:**

Social work profession believes that all people are unique and possess distinctive capabilities. When social workers affirm client's individuality, they recognize and appreciate their unique qualities and individual differences. They treat clients as persons with rights and needs rather than as objects or cases. Social workers free themselves from bias and prejudice, avoid labeling and stereotyping, and recognize the potential of diversity. They demonstrate that clients have a right to be individuals as well as to be treated not just as a human being but as this human being with personal differences.

- **Principle of Purposeful Expression of Feelings:** Social work profession considers emotions as integral part of human life, and people experience a range of feelings. Clients need to have opportunities to express their feelings freely. Social workers need to direct clients to express their feelings purposefully. Social workers have to go beyond the content of 'just the facts' to uncover feelings

that underlie these facts. Expressing feelings solidifies relationships. The purposeful expression of feelings brings feelings into the open so that they can be dealt with constructively, allows for a more accurate understanding of the effective or emotional elements of the situation, and provides opportunities for demonstrating psychological support.

- **Principle of Non-judgmental**

Attitude: Non-judgmental attitudes form the bases for effective working relationships. Non-judgmentalism signifies social workers' non-blaming attitudes and behaviors. Social workers do not judge others as good or bad, worthy or unworthy. Non-judgmental social work excludes assigning guilt or innocence, or degree of client responsibility for causation of the problems or needs, but does include making evaluative judgments about the attitudes, standards, or actions of the client.

- **Principle of Objectivity:** This principle of objectivity that is examining situations without bias is

closely related to non-judgmentalism. To be adhered by objective, social workers avoid injecting their personal feelings and prejudices into their relationships with clients.

- **Principle of Controlled Emotional Involvement:** Social workers are supposed to control their emotional involvements with clients. Social work practitioners gain perspective from their understanding of human behavior, seek direction for relationships from the general purpose of the social work profession and respond to clients' feelings with sensitivity. Over identifying with clients means that social workers are unable to differentiate their own responsibilities from clients' responsibilities in resolving problems. Over identification impedes objectivity and neutrality. Thus, social workers achieve controlled emotional involvement through their expression of empathy.
- **Principle of Self-Determination:** Through this principle, social workers recognize the 'right and

need of clients to freedom in making their own choices and decisions'. In other words, responsible social workers create working relationships in which clients exercise choice. Social workers are not supposed to impose solutions, treat clients as subordinates, and manipulate clients' decisions.

- **Principle of Access to Resources:** In social work profession, having access to resources is prerequisite for developing solutions. Since limited resources reduce options for solutions, and without options people cannot choose among alternatives.
- **Principle of Confidentiality:** Confidentiality or the right to privacy means that clients must give consent to disclose information such as their identity, their discussions with professionals, and professional opinions about them or records. Since clients often share sensitive or personal material with social workers, preserving confidentiality or privacy is significantly essential for developing trust that is a key ingredient of any effective

professional working relationship with clients.

- **Principle of Accountability:** Accountability means that social workers are supposed to be competent in the methods and techniques they use in their professional practice. Social workers take seriously their obligation to redress discriminatory and inhumane practice, act with unquestionable professional integrity, and implement sound practice and research protocols. Accountability extends to social workers' ethical responsibilities to their clients, colleagues, employing organizations, and society (DuBois & Miley, 1999).

Code of Ethics in Social Work Profession:

A social worker operates in terms of certain basic assumptions: (a) respect for human personality, (b) dignity of each human being, (c) matching resources with needs, (d) stimulating change calculated to enhance democratic values, (e) accomplishing change through co-operation on both intellectual and emotional levels, and (f) serving as a change agent from behind the scene, so that the individual or the group of

the community may emotionally feel that the change was not imposed from the outside but was autonomously sought by the individual, groups or community. The social worker gives respect to each client and believes in his creative power. He/she has full faith in the client's freedom of expression and self-judgment. The worker always operates on the democratic principles and values, and does not believe in any kind of discrimination on the basis of caste, creed, and religion. Social work as a profession in India is a recent origin of its education. The year 1936 made a watershed in the history of professional social work training in this country. Professional education for social work in India was started with the founding of the Sir Dorabji Tata Graduate School of Social Work in Bombay in 1936. Since then, social work is gaining momentum gradually (Misra, 1994).

Conclusion:

The mission of the Social work profession as well as the statements of its goals and objectives implicitly concern human needs and human strengths. Social work practice comprises a composite of scientific knowledge and professional skills that are employed by a professional social worker through the working six significant methods

of social work. Hence, social work profession is an art that requires great skills to understand people for helping them to help themselves and make them self-reliant people.

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